

Message Text

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17

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 1932

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SUBJECT: SPECIAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SESSION OPENS

REF: SEOUL 1767 (DTG 090916Z MAR 76)

SUMMARY: SPECIAL ASSEMBLY SESSION OPENED WITH ELECTION OF OFFICERS AND CONFIRMATION OF PRIME MINISTER CHOE KYU-HA; CHOE'S FIRST ADDRESS IN NEW OFFICE BROKE NO NEW GROUND AND AVOIDED PROBLEM OF DOMESTIC DISSENT. NDP SELECTION OF MODERATES TO QUESTION GOVERNMENT DURING MARCH 16-17 INTERPELLATIONS IS INDICATION OPPOSITION WILL ESSENTIALLY PLAY IT SAFE AND AVOID MAJOR CONFRONTATION OVER MARCH 1 INCIDENT. END SUMMARY.

1. 95TH SPECIAL NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SESSION OPENED ON SCHEDULE MARCH 12, AFTER GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION AGREED TO 12 DAY SESSION WITH TWO DAYS OF INTERPELLATIONS. AS EARLIER ANNOUNCED CHONG IL-KWON WAS FORMERLY RE-ELECTED AS SPEAKER, WHILE KU TAE-HOE AND YI MIN-U WERE ELECTED AS VICE SPEAKERS (REFTEL). DURING BRIEF SESSION MARCH 13, PRIME MINISTER CHOE KYU-HA WAS CONFIRMED 163 TO 34.

2. TONE OF ASSEMBLY WAS SET DURING SPEAKER'S OPENING REMARKS WHEN HE SAID POLARIZED SHOWDOWN BETWEEN RIVAL PARTIES IS THING OF THE PAST. NEW NDP VICE SPEAKER YI MIN-U FOLLOWED CHONG'S LEAD IN CALLING FOR DIALOGUE TRANSCENDING INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS.

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3. MAJOR EVENT OF MARCH 15 WAS CHOE'S FIRST ADDRESS TO THE ASSEMBLY AS PRIME MINISTER. HIS REPORT ON STATE AFFAIRS BROKE NO NEW GROUND AND CONTAINED NO SURPRISES; HE SAID THAT ROKG POLICY FOR 1976 IS TO GIVE PRIORITY TO NATIONAL SECURITY, ECONOMIC STABILIZATION AND GROWTH, AND CONSOLIDATION OF PEOPLE'S TOTAL UNITY. CHOE NOTED THAT RECENT INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS ILLUSTRATE THAT PEOPLE CAN NO LONGER DEPEND UPON FOREIGN ALLIES FOR DEFENSE, BUT MUST TAKE THIS RESPONSIBILITY THEMSELVES. IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN "INDEPENDENT" DEFENSE CHOE SAID GOVERNMENT WILL MODERNIZE ROK FORCES, IMPROVE HOMELAND RESERVE AND COMPLETE CIVIL DEFENSE ORGANIZATION. TURNING TO FOREIGN POLICY HE SAID ROKG WILL URGE RE-OPENING SOUTH-NORTH DIALOGUE AND WILL INCREASE EFFORTS TO GAIN INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT FOR ITS POLICIES. ON DOMESTIC FRONT HE STRESSED CONTINUING CAMPAIGN FOR ELIMINATION OF CORRUPTION AND SOCIAL EVILS. CHOE MADE NO MENTION OF MARCH 1 MYONGDONG DECLARATION OR GENERAL PROBLEM OF DOMESTIC DISSENT.

4. ACCORDING TO STEERING COMMITTEE AGREEMENT NEXT ASSEMBLY EVENTS ARE INTERPELLATIONS SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 16-17 FOLLOWED BY STANDING COMMITTEE SESSIONS AND FINAL PLENARY SESSION MARCH 23 FOR VOTE ON BILLS. WE CONTINUE TO ANTICIPATE SOME SHARP WORDS DURING INTERPELLATION AND ONE NDP ASSEMBLYMAN HAS TOLD US THERE WILL BE "A LOT OF COMMOTION". HOWEVER, DESPITE EARLIER REPORTS THAT PARTY LEADER KIM YONG-SAM WAS UNDER FIRE FOR FAILING TO LEAD STRONGER OPPOSITION ON GOVERNMENT OVER MARCH 1 INCIDENT AND THAT PRESSURE BUILDING FOR KIM TO PERSONALLY RAISE ISSUE ON ASSEMBLY FLOOR, IT APPEARS THAT KIM IS NOW BACKING AWAY FROM MAKING REAL OR PERSONAL CHALLENGE ON THIS ISSUE. OPPOSITION NDP HAS SELECTED THREE MODERATE ASSEMBLYMEN TO INTERPELLATE AND REMARKS OF NDP'S NEW VICE-SPEAKER AT OPENING SESSION WERE CONCILIATORY. NDP ASSEMBLYMAN HAS TOLD US THAT ROKG'S MARCH 10 STATEMENT CALLING MYONGDONG INCIDENT PLOT TO OVERTHROW GOVERNMENT IS CLEAR WARNING THAT PUSHING ISSUE TOO HARD IN ASSEMBLY IS TO ASK FOR SAME TREATMENT GIVEN ASSEMBLYWOMAN KIM OK-SON LAST FALL. WE HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT CONTRARY TO PAST PRACTICE NDP ASSEMBLYMEN HAVE TRIED TO AVOID PARTY SELECTION TO INTERPELLATE.

5. DURING FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE SESSIONS FOLLOWING INTER-CONFIDENTIAL

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PELLATIONS WE UNDERSTAND NDP ASSEMBLYMAN O SE-UNG PLANS TO CHALLENGE ROKG'S SUPPORT FOR REVEREND MUN'S UNIFICATION CHURCH ACTIVITIES IN THE UNITED STATES. EQUIPPED WITH EXTENSIVE FILE OF U.S. PRESS CLIPPINGS ON PLANS TO MAKE POINT THAT MUN EXACERBATES KOREA'S POOR IMAGE IN U.S. AND THAT GOVERNMENT SHOULD STOP PROVIDING MATERIAL SUPPORT TO MUN'S BUSINESS AND OTHER ENTERPRISES IN KOREA AND FORMALLY DISASSOCIATE ITSELF FROM HIS ACTIVITIES. SNEIDER

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